



**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**  
**Veterans Health Administration**  
**Washington DC 20420**

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**UNDER SECRETARY FOR HEALTH'S INFORMATION LETTER**

**INITIAL POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER EXAMINATION CHANGES**

**1. Purpose:** On July 16, 2010, the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) issued VBA Training Letter 10-05, Relaxation of Evidentiary Standard for Establishing In-Service Claims for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (see Title 38 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 3.404(f)(3)). The Training Letter provides guidance to VBA personnel on processing claims based on the regulatory changes, including requesting Compensation and Pension (C&P) examinations. The purpose of this Compensation and Pension Examination Program/Disability Examination Management Office (CPEP/DEMO) Information Letter is to notify C&P examiners of the new information that may be included in examination requests.

**2. Background**

a. Effective July 13, 2010, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) amended its rules for adjudicating disability compensation claims for PTSD at 38 CFR 3.304(f) to relax the evidentiary standard for establishing the required in-service stressor in certain cases.

b. VA now relies on a Veteran's lay testimony alone to establish occurrence of a stressor related to fear of hostile military or terrorist activity, provided that the claimed stressor is consistent with the places, types, and circumstances of service, and a VA psychiatrist or psychologist, or contract equivalent, determines that the claimed stressor is adequate to support a PTSD diagnosis and that the Veteran's symptoms are related to the claimed stressor.

**3. Examination Request**

a. The current PTSD examination worksheet/template for initial PTSD evaluation does require the examiner to address "fear." However, there is no requirement that the examiner determine if the fear is related to "hostile military or terrorist activity." In view of the absence of this requirement in the current worksheets/templates and the need for a determination of whether the stressor is due to "fear of hostile military or terrorist activity," modification of the PTSD examination worksheet/template for initial PTSD evaluation is necessary.

b. The examination template has an "Assessment" section that directs the examiner to make several clinical determinations in evaluating the Veteran. The following determination will be added: "Whether or not the claimed stressor is related to the Veteran's fear of hostile military or

terrorist activity.” The examination worksheet will contain this language in the Military History Section.

c. Until the new worksheet is finalized, regional office personnel requesting PTSD examinations in these cases need to add the preceding language to examination requests in order to ensure that examiners are aware of the change.

d. If a diagnosis of PTSD is made, the examiner needs to determine if the Veteran’s claimed stressor is related to the Veteran’s fear of in-service hostile military or terrorist activity. The current worksheet/template is otherwise adequate to encompass the new regulation. The initial PTSD examination is to be conducted by a VA psychiatrist or psychologist.

e. “Fear of hostile military or terrorist activity” means that a Veteran experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with an event or circumstances that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of the Veteran or others and the Veteran’s response to the event or circumstances involved a psychological or psycho-physiological state of fear, helplessness, or horror. The event or circumstances include, but are not limited to, the following:

- (1) Actual or potential improvised explosive device;
- (2) Vehicle-embedded explosive device;
- (3) Incoming artillery, rocket, or mortar fire;
- (4) Small arms fire, including suspected sniper fire; or
- (5) Attack upon friendly aircraft.

**4. Questions:** Contact CPEP/DEMO’s Policy and Program Operations at (727) 299-8687 with any questions concerning this Information Letter.

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